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ABSTRACT

This paper describes two exemplary school-based Native teacher education programs offered by Northern Arizona University (NAU) to serve Navajo students and by Lakehead University (Ontario) to serve members of the Nishnabe Nation of northern Ontario. The Reaching American Indian Special/Elementary Educators (RAISE) program is located in Kayenta, Arizona, on the Navajo Reservation. RAISE aims to improve recruitment and retention of special education teachers on the reservation. Each cohort of program participants includes Navajo paraprofessionals employed in Kayenta schools and non-Native students from the NAU campus. Throughout the RAISE program, all participants live on the reservation, work and receive coursework in reservation schools, and get to know each other's culture. The supportive and highly contextualized nature of the program have contributed to high program retention and completion rates. Lakehead University developed its Native Teacher Education Program (NTEP) to meet the need of the Nishnabe Nation for aboriginal teachers fluent in the Nishnabe language and knowledgeable of the culture. NTEP participants are mature adults who are native speakers of Nishnabe and who have extensive classroom experience as aides or uncertified teachers. Instruction is compressed into a very demanding 2 years and delivered primarily via two-way radio to 23 remote communities. Teacher-mentors provide support. The first two program cohorts graduated 40 of their 55 participants. (SV)

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Community-based Native Teacher Education Programs

Connie Heimbecker, Sam Minner, Greg Prater

School-based Native teacher education programs are relatively uncommon. This paper examines two pioneering programs based out of Northern Arizona University in Flagstaff, Arizona, serving Navajo students and Lakehead University in Thunder Bay, Ontario, serving members of the Nishnabe Nation of Northern Ontario.

Teacher education programs that prepare teachers within the context of functioning elementary and secondary schools are widely discussed and debated (Lapan & Minner, 1997). Studies show that effective preparation of good teachers includes intensive practical experience with K-12 students under carefully supervised conditions in collaboration with experienced teachers (Holmes Group, 1990; Carnegie Forum on Education, 1986; Wise & Darling-Hammond, 1987). School-based programs are a particularly effective way of recruiting minority teachers into the profession because they can stay in their home communities, which provide the social supports needed to enable them to graduate at a very high rate (Prater, Miller & Minner, 1997).

School-based Native teacher education programs are relatively uncommon in the United States and Canada. In this paper we describe some of the features of two exemplary school-based Native teacher education programs based out of Northern Arizona University (NAU) in Flagstaff, Arizona, serving Navajo students and Lakehead University in Thunder Bay, Ontario, serving members of the Nishnabe Nation of Northern Ontario.

RAISE Program in Kayenta, Arizona

The Reaching American Indian Special/Elementary Educators (RAISE) program is located in Kayenta, Arizona, on the Navajo Indian Reservation, which covers 24,000 square miles. With a population of approximately 5,000, Kayenta is one of the largest communities on the reservation. An important goal of the RAISE program is to decrease the attrition rate of special education teachers working on the Navajo Reservation. Lancaster (1992) surveyed 45 rural school districts on Arizona Reservations and found that some schools reported a 100% turnover rate of special education teachers, while the average attrition rate was 35%. Stressors such as challenges working with parents, geographical factors, cultural features, and professional and social isolation contributed to teacher retention and recruitment problems (Helge & Marrs, 1981; Helge, 1980).

Few special education teacher training programs focus on preparing teachers to work in rural and remote areas, and it is difficult to recruit and retain special education teachers to work on American Indian reservations (Helge, 1983; Peterson & Montfort, 1997). By providing experiential field-based training that immerses students in Navajo culture and by recruiting paraprofessionals in the

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Kayenta Unified School District (KUSD), the RAISE program develops teachers who are more likely to spend their entire professional careers teaching Navajo students. Many participants in this project commented that without the RAISE program they probably would not have become teachers.

The KUSD plays a significant role in the RAISE program. The KUSD's K-12 enrollment for the 1998-99 year was 2,740 students living in an area of 3,000 square miles. Home language surveys indicate that Navajo is the primary language spoken in 92% of student homes. The primary and intermediate schools both have one transitional bilingual classroom for each grade level, kindergarten through fifth, with approximately 18-25 students in each classroom. Twelve teachers in the District hold bilingual Navajo teaching endorsements. Beginning in fifth grade there is funding for an ESL program for which approximately 63% of students are eligible. Many students are in an ESL certified teacher's classroom, and all elementary teachers (grades 7-12) and language arts teachers (grades 7-12) are required to begin work on a 21 credit hour ESL endorsement within the first year that they are hired. Approximately 80% of students ride the bus to school every day—some for as long as 3 hours a day. Two hundred and twenty-three students are enrolled in special education programs in the KUSD.

Funding for the RAISE program is through a three-year grant provided by the Department of Education's Office of Rehabilitation Services. This grant enables delivery of the year and a half long RAISE program to two cohorts of students for about $115,000 a year. Grant funds available for students' textbooks, fees, materials, and professional development are crucial because of financial constraints faced by students, most of whom are adults with family responsibilities.

Every two years up to 18 participants are recruited for the next RAISE cohort. Usually about half of the participants are selected from the NAU Flagstaff campus and half from the Kayenta community. Students from the Flagstaff campus find out about the program in a first year education course all education majors are required to take. They complete an application and write an essay detailing why they want to participate in the program. Applicants must be admitted to NAU's teacher education program before they may be considered for the RAISE program.

Navajo paraprofessionals employed by the KUSD are also encouraged to apply. The RAISE Project Director and Project Manager, who are NAU faculty, assist KUSD administrators in the selection of Kayenta applicants. Project personnel rely heavily upon input from the KUSD Special Education Director who is a long term resident of Kayenta and a well respected Navajo educator. Since 1992, the student makeup of cohorts with the RSEP and RAISE programs has varied from year to year. Typically students recruited from the main campus are non-Indian women in their early twenties following the traditional path towards an undergraduate degree and teacher certification. Kayenta participants are usually thirty-year-old Navajo women who are married with two or more children. Some students need to travel long distances in order to participate in the program. For many participants, their mother-tongue language is Navajo.

English is a second language for them, but they are fully bilingual. Some Navajo students speak English as a first language, though this is rarely standard English. Similarly, different dialects of Navajo are spoken by different students coming from different parts of the reservation. Some students are biliterate in Navajo and English.

Throughout the RAISE program students learn about each other culturally, with all participants living on the reservation. Students in every new cohort participate in two orientations. The first orientation is on the Flagstaff campus where special education and Native American faculty and students make presentations to students. The goals of this presentation is to share information about Native American culture and to discuss potential issues that could arise during the year. Throughout RAISE classes, Anglo, Navajo, and Hopi cultures are discussed. Indian students are encouraged to act as cultural advisors to the Anglo students who in many cases have had minimal experience with Native American culture and traditions. Anglo students experience the culture first hand at such events as Navajo weddings, ceremonies, and the Navajo Nation Fair. The RAISE program also makes special efforts to engage students in the profession of education. Students in each cohort collaboratively research, write, submit, and deliver papers at local, regional, and national professional meetings. Many papers have been published in conference proceedings.

For example, one project involved getting Indian students' perceptions of the characteristics of effective teachers. Students answered the following survey questions:

" What kind of teacher do you learn the most from?"

- I learn the most from teachers who have hands-on projects. They listen to your ideas. They don't make you feel uncomfortable when you talk to them.
- Teachers that explain new ideas and show new ideas on how to learn different things in different ways.
- Ones that show respect and teach me responsibility.
- She can always help and explain things when you don't understand.
- I learn the most from strict teachers who give homework, who are easy to be with, and have a good sense of humor.

"If you were a teacher, what will you do in your classroom? What wouldn't you do?" A summary of the responses indicates they will teach with patience and honesty, being careful to never put anyone down and to teach by the golden rule. Some of the students' responses were as follows:

- Teach kids, be honest, and I wouldn't yell at my students. I will have to be patient.
- As a teacher I will try to get to know each person individually. To see how they were doing at home and at school.

- Help them but never put them down, help them understand and make learning be fun and interesting.
- I will teach my class, treat them the way they want to be treated.

"What are some things that teachers do that may prevent you from learning?"

- Slams about their culture
- Having boring lectures, talking too slow.
- Letting kids mess around or talk when someone else is talking.
- They move through a section of work too fast, and don't explain the work, often speak too quickly and don't repeat themselves

Another question important to elaborate on regarding cultural sensitivity was question six of the survey, "Do you believe effective teachers need to be aware and sensitive of the culture of the students they are teaching?" An overwhelming response was in favor of cultural sensitivity. They believed it was important so that their culture was not made fun of and so that the teacher will not be put in an unknowing situation that could allow them to offend their students. However, some students expressed the fact that they still want to be taught the basic skills: "reading, math, writing, with culture not being a big issue" (Prater, Rezzonico, Pyron, Chischille, Arthur, & Yellowhair, 1995).

Students enter the RAISE program with all required liberal arts courses completed. Admission requirements, course of studies, and student teaching expectations for the RAISE program are similar to those at the home campus, but all courses are highly contextualized for the settings in which students live and work. Ideas offered in class are related to students' classroom experience, while suggestions made during the Teacher Aide practicum are related to course work. When methods of data collection are discussed in class, students often practice the techniques in their practicum setting the following day. Participants employed by the KUSD work in their classrooms week days, while those from the main campus complete their Teacher Aide practicum requirements on weekday mornings or substitute teach throughout the day. All participants attended classes weekday evenings. Throughout the program, students complete all required elementary and special education courses. The 46 hours of coursework focus on foundations, methods, assessment, and curriculum and the teacher aide practicum. One student stated, "The time we spend in the KUSD classrooms is invaluable. I already feel like a real teacher."

Currently all coursework is delivered on site at the RAISE classroom situated within the KUSD intermediate school. The project manager typically teaches class two or three afternoons a week. Another faculty member travels to Kayenta to teach one night a week and in the past has taught via Interactive Instructional Television. KUSD teachers and administrators with Masters degrees and expertise in certain areas serve as instructors for specific courses. Additional faculty from the home campus deliver guest lectures on special topics.

Students in the program enter as a cohort, see each other every week day, and are encouraged to work cooperatively in class and when working on assignments. Students assist and support each other in many ways (e.g., offering rides to class, helping with childcare, etc.). One student this year commented, "We all seem like one big family. We all support each other." This type of statement is made each year by various program participants. These and other factors such as highly contextualized and relevant curriculum and the focus on full professional development of project participants have contributed to a high RAISE and Rural Special Education Project (funded by an OSER's grant between 1992 and 1998) retention rate. Between 1992 and 1996, the retention rate of Native Americans in the early RSEP program was 100%, with 36 participants completing the program.

On-going program evaluation has been built into the RSEP and RAISE programs. All participants are required to keep a daily journal of reflections, documenting their feelings and experiences with the program (courses, teaching, professional development activities, etc.). These journals are periodically reviewed by grant personnel. Student achievement of competencies outlined in the original program proposal are assessed in their practicum settings, under the supervision of program faculty and mentor teachers, and through written and oral presentations in coursework. An informal survey conducted among 1994-95 RSEP participants showed that students had gained a great deal from the experience both culturally and educationally. Many Indians stated that RSEP had given them the opportunity to further their education without having to relocate families and move to the main campus. Other Native Americans felt the program had given them the opportunity to view the Anglo culture in a different way than how they were taught. By the end of the program, both Native and Anglo participants felt more confident in the classroom.

Lakehead University's Native Teacher Education Program

From 1993 to 1996, Lakehead University (LU) offered three community-based Native teacher education programs in conjunction with program management committees for the Sioux Lookout District, the Rainy Lake Education Authority, and the Wabeseemoong Education Authority. The programs offered to each of these communities were very similar. Within this paper we will focus only on the Sioux Lookout District Program.

Lakehead University, in Thunder Bay, offers pre-service teacher education programs leading to provincial certification, in-service professional teacher education courses, and graduate Master of Education programs. It has offered an on-campus Native Teacher Education Program (NTEP) since 1974. In 1993, Lakehead University entered an agreement with the Northern Nishnabe Education Council (which delivers off-reserve education services to First Nation students from the Sioux Lookout District) and the Sioux Lookout District Native Teacher Education Program Management Committee. The goal of the Sioux Lookout District Native Teacher Education Program Management Committee

(PMC) was to ensure the provision of a teacher education program that meets the needs of the District's First Nations peoples.

LU agreed to provide a two year Native Teacher Education Program in accordance with standards established by the LU Faculty of Education and the Ontario Ministry of Education. The LU program enabled candidates to obtain a Primary/Junior (kindergarten to grade six) Ontario Teacher Certificate. Supervision of student teachers was provided by qualified LU staff in a manner very similar to the on-campus program. LU provided education courses designed to train teachers to deliver a bilingual/bicultural program and meet the needs of First Nations communities. LU staffed the program according to university policies, with involvement of the PMC Coordinator. In conjunction with the PMC Coordinator, LU arranged practice teaching schedules and assessed candidates. Lakehead University ensured the design and delivery of the teacher education program that met the needs of the Sioux Lookout District First Nations by adapting courses to meet First Nations needs. LU monitored and evaluated the program, assisted with on-site student counseling, supervised students, and worked with district First Nations communities (Lakehead University, 1997).

LU's Sioux Lookout Program simultaneously served 23 different communities scattered throughout Northwestern Ontario between Lake Superior and Hudson Bay. They range in size from approximately 80 people to over 400. Most are "fly-in" communities, accessible only by plane. Each community has a school with three to 52 staff members and is populated primarily by members of the Nishnabe Nation. Virtually all communities are reserves with band controlled schools administered by the local First Nations Band Council versus the provincial Ministry of Education or the federal Department of Indian Affairs. As such, they are able to hire uncertified teachers for their schools. Each of these teachers assumes full responsibility for her or his classroom.

The First Nations of the Sioux Lookout District needed aboriginal teachers who were fluent in the Nishnabe language and knowledgeable of the Nishnabe culture. Such teachers could deliver bilingual/bicultural programs and act as role models to students in their schools. Teacher candidates could not drive to university campuses to take education courses. Mature and experienced classroom assistants and uncertified teachers usually have large families that cannot relocate to an urban center for four year university programs. Consequently, one of the primary goals of the Sioux Lookout Program was to instruct Native teacher candidates to develop and deliver high quality bilingual-bicultural programs in First Nations schools of the Sioux Lookout District. Native teacher candidates were taught to implement a variety of teaching strategies required to meet the needs of multigrade classrooms and classrooms with a wide range of student ability levels. Candidates learned to plan lessons, units, and activities that would meet the needs of Native First Language, English Second Language, and English Second Dialect students (Lakehead University, 1996).

First Nations communities recommended suitable teacher candidates to the program (i.e. adults fluent in the Native language who had classroom experi-

ence and were working or volunteering in a school). School principals agreed to release students with pay from teaching responsibilities to attend classes and the student teaching practicum. The Nishnabe Nation Education Council contracted with LU for delivery of the Sioux Lookout Program and paid for tuition and student and instructor travel and accommodations during coursework and student teaching. Wherever possible, LU supported the ongoing needs of the program via the university's application for provincial and federal funds. The Nishnabe Nation Education Council secured funding for the program primarily from federal grants.

The PMC and LU developed teacher candidate selection criteria similar to the University's admission regulations. The PMC and LU's Faculty of Education jointly reviewed applications and determined acceptance to the program. Selection criteria of PMC included that candidates had to be mature Native people fluent in a Native language with classroom experience. LU preferred that candidates have the requirements of a secondary graduation diploma or equivalent, but relevant life experience was included in the admission evaluation when an applicant had not completed grade 12. English and math courses offered during the first summer of the program were used to assess candidates' skills in terms of ability to handle course materials. Those candidates unable to successfully complete these courses were encouraged to enroll in upgrading courses and reapply to a later program.

Students who entered the NTEP were Nishnabe people who spoke Nishnabe as their first language and English as their second language. Many students were also biliterate. All students were mature adults with extensive classroom experience. Many were classroom teacher aides or uncertified teachers for five to ten years or more. Approximately two-thirds of the candidates were female. Candidates ranged in age from about 20 to 55 years old, with most between 25 and 35.

Students enrolled in the Sioux Lookout NTEP took only the education component of LU's four-year B.A./B.Ed. program. While typically students in a B.A./B.Ed. program took their Arts courses before their education courses, NTEP students began with their third and fourth year education courses. They were then able to take their first, second, and third year Arts courses after their education courses. The NTEP program included two introductory and orientation courses, seven and one-half B.A./B.Ed credit courses, two non-credit half courses, and a student teaching component.

Instructional delivery methods for these courses consisted of on-site instruction at Lakehead University's main campus and the Pelican Falls Education Center and two-way radio broadcast transmission via the Wahsa Distance Education network. Classroom interaction between students and faculty was supplemented by classes via simulcast radio. Approximately two-thirds of the coursework was done in each student's home community.

The PMC coordinator stated that "One of the greatest challenges of the NTEP program to be resolved is how to keep the students committed

for the duration of the program." The program was condensed into a very demanding two-years, and unlike on campus students, NTEP students were working full-time as educators throughout the duration of the program (often with primary responsibility for the classrooms in which they work). In contrast to the on-campus program, the majority of students were women with obligations to the family as homemaker, mother, and wife. When candidates were released from their classroom responsibilities for student teaching, they were often required to prepare weeks of lesson plans for substitute teachers (Levi, 1998a).

The coordinator also cited reasons students gave for dropping out of the program. These included feelings of guilt for neglecting their families and work; loneliness during summer sessions and practicum; feeling overwhelmed by obligations of family, work, and school; lack of time to complete assignments; being assigned full classroom responsibilities without sufficient direction or feedback; lack of support from family, friends, employer, and colleagues; poor organizational and time management skills; and social problems and unresolved personal issues. One response to these issues was to implement a mentor program. School principals were consulted and asked to select a teacher/mentor for each student. The mentor worked closely with the student on a daily basis, providing an example of professional behavior and additional support (Levi, 1998a).

The graduation rate for the Sioux Lookout Community Based Native Teacher Education Program was high considering the numerous demands, responsibilities, and challenges that candidates have faced. Of the 20 students registered in the first 1993-1995 program, 15 students graduated (75%). From among the 35 students registered in the second 1995-1997 program, 25 graduated (72%). With a total of 55 graduates in four years, as of 1998, 44 were teachers, three were principals, two were working in non-teaching jobs, one was employed as a teacher assistant, and one was employed as a tutor escort (Levi, 1998b).

During the summer of 1998, the PMC coordinator conducted a program evaluation for the 1997-1999 program (Levi, 1998a). Participants were asked to list the strengths and weaknesses of the program and to make suggestions for improvement and other comments. Program strengths included:

- The instructors know their field and share that knowledge with us.
- There is a good selection of courses to meet the requirements.
- This program shows encouragement to have Native teachers.
- The radio teleconferencing courses are effective and very convenient.
- Funding provides the practical resources we need for our studies.
- Most of the courses are interesting and challenging.
- It has helped having the opportunity to get experience in the classroom and in other schools.
- I would not be able to take classes like this if the program was not brought to the North.
- Working with other students is a real incentive and encouragement.

Weaknesses included:

- Scheduling of courses is too close to holidays.
- Some of the lectures are too long.
- More hands on activities are needed to gain even more practical experience.
- There is a lack of student input into schedules, it would help if the students' were consulted on scheduling too.
- We need more resources. There is a lack of research materials for assignments.
- A one week course is too little time to cover everything.

Additionally, students mention that it was a great program and that it gave them the opportunity to stay in their communities and be with their family and friends.

Conclusion

The most significant differences between these programs are what we perceive as their highlights. Many students perceive the highlight of the RAISE program to be the opportunity to research, write, and present an academic paper at a minimum of one national conference. Over the years of the program, students have presented in Tucson (Arizona), Albuquerque (New Mexico), and Washington (D.C.). In contrast, students of LU's NTEP have often cited the highlight of their program as being the opportunity to student teach in First Nations communities and schools other than their own.

We think that these programs provide a tremendous opportunity for indigenous students, their schools, and their communities. Educators who otherwise may never have the chance to pursue teacher training are becoming teachers, department heads, principals, and role models in remote and rural Native communities. Furthermore, they are able to pursue this training while continuing to contribute to the educational endeavors of their schools and communities. Consequently, key educators are not leaving the community at a crucial time in their community's development.

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